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Law Library Briefs

Roger Williams University School of Law Library



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Resources for Studying Law and Law School Writing

The Law Library staff welcomes new and returning students. We wish each one of you a successful academic year. To assist you with studying the law and your various writing projects, the Law Library offers a wealth of print and electronic resources. This article will highlight some of them.

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• *Treat every moment in class as sacred; your job is to learn how to analyze legal problems like your professor(s), and the best way to do that is to be prepared for class and totally engaged in the classroom discussion.* Dean and Professor of Law David A. Logan
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Studying Law

Studying legal subject areas can be challenging as you strive to learn unfamiliar terms and complex concepts. Do not despair! The best study aids on legal subject areas on the market and in the Law Library's collection are those authored by legal scholars and practitioners. Some study aids are referred to as either hornbooks, nutshells, or treatises. Each of these study aids covers the terms and concepts of a particular subject area in varying degrees of detail from basic to comprehensive in their coverage of the subject. These study aids reference cases, statutes, and secondary sources such as law review articles, *American Law Reports* annotations, and other resources. Leading publishers of study aids are Thomson/

West, LexisNexis, and Aspen Publishers. Foundation Press, an independent affiliate of Thomson/West, also publishes study aids. The treatises published by the various legal publishers provide the most comprehensive coverage of a legal subject area and may consist of one volume or several volumes. Selected treatises are available on LexisNexis and Westlaw. Hornbooks and nutshells are published by Thomson/West. LexisNexis publishes the "Understanding..." series and Aspen Publishers publishes the *Examples and Explanations* series of study aids. These study aids are generally not available electronically. Current editions of the hornbooks, nutshells, and "Examples and Explanations" and "Understanding..." series are available on Reserve. Older editions of these books, if available, are shelved in the stacks. Copy 1 and Copy 2 of a study aid on Reserve circulate for two hours and are restricted to use within the Law Library. Copy 3 and higher of a study aid on Reserve can be checked out of the Law Library for forty-eight hours. The older editions shelved in the stacks can be checked out from the Law Library for twenty-one days.

Study aids can be found by author, by advanced keyword, by subject, or by title using the Law Library's WebCatalog. The Law Library publishes a "Study Aids:..." series which is an annotated listing of study aids in the Law Library's collection for first-year courses (civil procedure, con-

tracts, criminal law, property, and torts). Other subject areas in the series are constitutional law, evidence, federal taxation, and professional responsibility. They are on top of the bookcase located at the entrance to the Law Library.

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• *Law school training is not just concerned with acquiring knowledge about a body of law; it is, even more importantly, concerned with the development of skills and characteristics that are essential to the professional lawyer. Study aids, as a supplement to required readings and class discussions—rather than as a primary source—can be helpful in building knowledge of an area of law. Essential lawyering skills and attributes such as precision, professionalism, creativity, careful listening, effective public speaking, and practical judgment are more readily developed during class discussions and conversations outside class with your professors and peers.* Professor Colleen P. Murphy
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CALI Lessons and Podcasts

The CALI (Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction) website at www2.cali.org contains interactive lessons on numerous legal subject areas. When signing up for access at

the CALI website, you will need to obtain the law school's authorization code from a reference librarian. Podcasts on legal topics by various law school professors are also available for downloading by clicking "Podcasts/Blogs" from the menu bar and then selecting "CALI Radio: Podcasts on Legal Education Topics."

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You are not here to learn the law as much as to learn how to analyze the law on your own. Therefore, any study aid that does the thinking for you is a mistake. Avoid canned case summaries like the plague. If you have time, the best study aids are treatises – what we call "hornbooks," such as those in the hornbook series from Thomson-West. Thomson-West and LexisNexis also have mini-hornbook series, which are called, respectively, the "Nutshell" and the "Understanding" series. All of the authors are respected scholar-teachers in the subject areas, but the goal in these series is to balance completeness with efficiency, so these mini-treatises are relatively easy and quick reads. Professor Carl T. Bogus

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Law School Writing Resources and Selecting a Topic

In addition to a consultation with the Writing Specialist Kim Baker, there are sources available in the Law Library's collection to assist you with your writing. The *TimeSaver*, No. 4 "Selected Bibliography for Legal Research and Writing" is an annotated listing of texts for legal research, legal writing, and writing style. Also described in the *TimeSaver* are citation materials, dictionaries, thesauri,

and grammar references. This *TimeSaver* is distributed to all incoming first-year students.

For first-year students, writing your first memorandum of law and appellate brief can be a challenging experience as you most likely did not write either prior to coming to law school! The *TimeSaver* No. 4 "Selected Bibliography for Legal Research and Writing" covers texts on legal writing that discuss writing a memorandum of law and generally include a sample of one. *TimeSaver* No. 6 "Appellate Advocacy, Brief Writing, and Oral Argument" is a useful annotated listing of texts on writing an appellate brief. Sample briefs are generally included in these texts. This *TimeSaver* is distributed to first-year students at the beginning of the spring semester. Each of these *TimeSavers* is updated annually. The *TimeSavers* series is designed to provide researchers with good places to start their research and is available in pdf format by selecting "Research Guides" from the Library's pull-down menu on the law school's website.

For second and third-year students who struggle to come up with a topic for a course paper or directed research, try looking at the Tables of Contents of hornbooks, nutshells, and treatises in the subject area on which you are writing. Other sources of inspiration are general and legal newspapers subscribed to by the Law Library such as the *National Law Journal*, *New York Law Journal*, *Lawyers USA*, the *ABA Journal*, the *American Lawyer*, and the *New York Times*. For details about these, consult *TimeSaver* No. 7 "Newspapers in the Law Library." Some useful electronic services for obtaining ideas for paper topics are offered by the Bureau of National Affairs. Updated weekly, these electronic services report on cases, proposed and recently

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A wise colleague once said, "We don't just teach the law, we teach who we are." In my classes, I try to evoke the intensity, passion, and sense of the absurd that I experienced as a federal prosecutor in Washington, D.C. I also challenge students to dig deeper into what may seem obvious and simple. While at first this effort can result in bewildering complexity, with perseverance, students ultimately reap a deeper insight into the law and into their capacity to analyze and use language with precision. Professor David M. Zlotnick

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enacted legislation, agency actions, and activities of organizations in several subject areas of law that include criminal, environmental, family, health, intellectual property, and professional conduct. Of particular note is *U.S. Law Week* which covers case law from state and federal courts including the U.S. Supreme Court. For a complete listing of and access to the BNA electronic services, select "Online Resources" from the Library's pull-down menu at the law school's website. For more suggestions about selecting a topic, read *TimeSaver* No. 10 "Selecting a Topic." If you are a bit rusty on writing a research paper, check out *Scholarly Writing For Law Students: Seminar Papers, Law Review Notes, and Law Review Competition Papers*, 3d ed (Reserve KF250 .F34 2005) or *Academic Legal Writing: Law Review Articles, Student Notes, and Seminar Papers*, 2d ed (Reserve, KF250 .V6 2005).

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